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SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR D, P, T AND SA

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SUBJECT: ENGAGING THE SRI LANKAN MILITARY AFTER DOD ASSESSMENTS

Classified By: AMBASSADOR E.A. WILLS; REASONS 1.5 (b, d)

Summary

1. (S) DOD has just completed three major assessments of the SL military. These assessments make plain that the Sri Lankan military forms a central component of the GSL's strategy to secure peace in the country after 20 years of civil war. The GSL needs the support of the military to make peace work here. The GSL, in turn, wants and needs American engagement with the military to help ensure that support, and to make Sri Lanka's armed services more professional, more respectful of human rights and less vulnerable to the blandishments of Sinhalese extremists. End Summary.

2. (C) Over the past several weeks, three separate DOD assessment teams have visited Sri Lanka: NDU, which looked at military education; PACCOM, which assessed operational and equipment matters; and DPE, which evaluated doctrinal issues. Although we await submission of the teams' final reports, some dominant themes have emerged from the preliminary assessments as they were briefed to the CT:

-- the GSL has no national security or national military strategy;

-- the military has pursued a war-fighting strategy almost devoid of accurate, real-time tactical intelligence;

-- widespread recognition exists that the SL military has followed outdated doctrines and a defensive strategy, including maritime interdiction, for which it is ill-equipped and undermanned;

--the military has been severely handicapped by the lack of a merit-based personnel system and by very limited professional education opportunities.

3. (C) As we have noted in our prior reporting, the military plays a key role in the GSL's ongoing peace effort. The military's support of or at least acquiescence to the ceasefire, negotiations with the LTTE, and loosening of the once-restrictive security environment that characterized Sri Lanka is essential for the GSL to keep the Sinhalese majority on-side. The GSL, again as we have reported at length, has come to us for help in maintaining the military's support, by holding out to it the hope of having its serious deficiencies rectified. The GSL wants a modern, confident military willing to take a chance on peace because it knows it could prevail, or come a lot closer to prevailing than it ever has before, if war resumed. In addition, of course, the presence of such a military induces the LTTE to continue down the path of peace. Velluparai Prabhakaran only respects strength and exploits weakness. Thus, it is in the GSL's interest, and ours, to have a strong Sri Lankan military.

4. (S) If we intend to help the GSL modernize and professionalize its military, we need to respond to reasonable requests for military assistance. The ongoing and very effective JCET and other exercise/training/education programs, including in human rights, need to continue and even pick up. But even more critical, we will need to help the military deal with at least some of the deficiencies our assessment teams have identified. Most of those deficiencies have to do with structure, doctrine, and training. To address some, however, the SL military needs modern military equipment, some of which the US is best positioned to provide. In particular, the Navy needs a variety of gear that will enable it to patrol and protect the country's coastline and territorial waters from poachers, smugglers, and LTTE resupply efforts. The Air Force and Navy need proper training and equipment to conduct SAR operations in case of a downed aircraft (military or civilian) or a foundered ship.

5. (S) There are many, many more examples of potential equipment needs that the assessment report from PACCOM will cite. We know that we cannot address all of the deficiencies and that the GSL military will never become a "Mini-Me" version of the US military. We do, however, think that with appropriate help from us (and, perhaps others) the SL military can continue to evolve into a pro-American

institution that respects human rights and is ready, willing and able to play a full and effective role in Sri Lanka's national security strategy and, later on, in international peacekeeping efforts.

16. (C) As soon as we have received all the assessments we would like to re-engage with Washington agencies on how best to address the SL military's pressing needs. We understand the the 04 budget allotments for FMF for Sri Lanka are fixed. But we wonder whether an 03 supplemental could include additional FMF funds to permit the USG to engage with the GSL military.

WILLS